

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1-15, amend claim 16, and add new claims 30-42. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claims 1-15 (canceled)

16. (currently amended) A method for producing a nutritionally superior cheese product having at least a first discrete phase and a second discrete phase, wherein the first discrete phase comprises a cheese phase and the second discrete phase comprises a second edible phase, said method comprising:

(1) providing a cheese phase in the form of cheese chucks or cheese shreds at a temperature of about 45 to about 70°F, wherein the cheese phase has a water activity of about 0.85 to about 0.95 and pH of about 4.5 to about 6, and wherein the cheese chucks or cheese shreds are formed from process cheese, uncured natural cheese, or cured natural cheese;

(2) providing a second edible phase having a water activity of about 0.85 to about 0.95 and pH of about 4.5 to about 6;

(3) co-extruding the cheese phase and second edible phase under low to moderate shear conditions without the use of adhesive or heat to bind the cheese phase and the second edible phase together as discrete phases to form a nutritionally superior cheese extruded product; and

(4) cutting the nutritionally superior cheese extruded product to the desired length to form the nutritionally superior cheese product.

17. (original) The method as defined in claim 16, wherein the first discrete phase consists essentially of the cheese phase and the second discrete phase consists essentially of the second edible phase.

18. (original) The method as defined in claim 17, wherein the water activity of the second edible phase is within about 0.02 units of the water activity of the cheese

phase and the pH of the second edible phase is within about 0.2 units of the pH of the cheese phase.

19. (original) The method as defined in claim 17, wherein at least one of the first and second discrete phases contains a nutritional supplement.

20. (original) The method as defined in claim 18, wherein at least one of the first and second discrete phases contains a nutritional supplement.

21. (original) The method as defined in claim 17, wherein second edible phase is selected from the group consisting of vegetables, meats, mixtures of vegetables and meats, fruits, and nuts.

22. (original) The method as defined in claim 18, wherein second edible phase is selected from the group consisting of vegetables, meats, mixtures of vegetables and meats, fruits, and nuts.

23. (original) The method as defined in claim 20, wherein second edible phase is selected from the group consisting of vegetables, meats, mixtures of vegetables and meats, fruits, and nuts.

24. (original) The method as defined in claim 17, wherein the second edible phase is pasteurized and then cooled prior to co-extrusion.

25. (original) The method as defined in claim 18, wherein the second edible phase is pasteurized and then cooled prior to co-extrusion.

26. (original) The method as defined in claim 20, wherein the second edible phase is pasteurized and then cooled prior to co-extrusion.

27. (original) The method as defined in claim 21, wherein the second edible phase is pasteurized and then cooled prior to co-extrusion.

28. (original) The method as defined in claim 22, wherein the second edible phase is pasteurized and then cooled prior to co-extrusion.

29. (original) The method as defined in claim 23, wherein the second edible phase is pasteurized and then cooled prior to co-extrusion.

30. (new) The method as defined in claim 16, wherein the cheese phase comprises a cured natural cheese.

31. (new) The method as defined in claim 16, wherein the cured cheese phase comprises a cured natural cheese selected from the group consisting of cured mozzarella cheese, cured cheddar cheese, cured cream cheese, cured Havarti cheese, cured Colby cheese, and cured Monterey Jack cheese.

32. (new) The method as defined in claim 16, wherein the co-extruding the cheese phase and second edible phase under at a shear rate or pressure and under conditions whereby the viscosity of the cheese phase and the second edible phase are not reduced by less than about 10 percent.

33. (new) The method as defined in claim 16, wherein the cheese phase has a viscosity of about 50,000 to about 500,000 cps, and the second edible phase has a viscosity of about 50,000 to about 500,000 cps.

34. (new) The method as defined in claim 16, wherein the cheese phase has a viscosity of about 200,000 to about 500,000 cps, and the second edible phase has a viscosity of about 200,000 to about 500,000 cps.

35. (new) The method as defined in claim 16, wherein the co-extruding further comprises selecting extruder feed rates effective to provide a nutritionally superior cheese product containing about 30 to about 70 percent cheese phase and about 70 to about 30 percent second edible phase.

36. (new) A method for producing a nutritionally superior cheese product having at least a first discrete phase and a second discrete phase, wherein the first discrete phase comprises a cheese phase and the second discrete phase comprises a second edible phase, said method comprising:

(1) providing a cheese phase in the form of cheese chunks or cheese shreds at a temperature of about 50 to about 68°F, wherein the cheese phase has a water activity of about 0.87 to about 0.93, a pH of about 4.8 to about 5.2, and a viscosity of about 50,000 to about 500,000 cps;

(2) providing a second edible phase having a water activity of about 0.87 to about 0.93, a pH of about 4.8 to about 5.2, and a viscosity of about 50,000 to about 500,000 cps, wherein the water activity of the second edible phase is within about 0.02 units of the water activity of the cheese phase and the pH of the second edible phase is within about 0.2 units of the pH of the cheese phase;

(3) co-extruding the cheese phase and second edible phase under at a shear rate or pressure and under conditions whereby the viscosity of the cheese phase and the second edible phase are not reduced by less than about 20 percent, and without the use of adhesive or heat to bind the cheese phase and the second edible phase together as discrete phases to form a nutritionally superior cheese extruded product; and

(4) cutting the nutritionally superior cheese extruded product to the desired length to form the nutritionally superior cheese product.

37. (new) The method as defined in claim 36, wherein the co-extruding the cheese phase and second edible phase under at a shear rate or pressure and under conditions whereby the viscosity of the cheese phase and the second edible phase are not reduced by less than about 10 percent.

38. (new) The method as defined in claim 36, wherein the cheese phase has a viscosity of about 200,000 to about 500,000 cps, and the second edible phase has a viscosity of about 200,000 to about 500,000 cps.

39. (new) The method as defined in claim 36, wherein the cheese phase comprises a cured natural cheese.

40. (new) The method as defined in claim 36, wherein the cheese phase comprises a cured natural cheese selected from the group consisting of cured mozzarella cheese, cured cheddar cheese, cured cream cheese, cured Havarti cheese, cured Colby cheese, and cured Monterey Jack cheese.

41. (new) The method as defined in claim 36, wherein the co-extruding further comprises selecting extruder feed rates effective to provide a nutritionally superior cheese product containing about 30 to about 70 percent cheese phase and about 70 to about 30 percent second edible phase.

42. (new) The method as defined in claim 36, wherein the cheese chucks or cheese shreds are formed from process cheese, uncured natural cheese, or cured natural cheese.